DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 098 CS 502 991

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TITLE Preparing Consultants for Multinational Consulting.
PUB DATE May 80
NOTE 36p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (30th, Acapulco, Mexico, May 18-23, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business: Communication (Thought Transfer): Communication Problems: *Consultants: Cross Cultural Training: *Cultural Awareness: Cultural Differences: *Foreign Nationals: Group Dynamics: Interaction: *International Programs: *Needs Assessment: *Organizational Communication

ABSTRACT

The three sections of this paper, written by General Motors Corporation employees from three different countries, discuss different aspects of communication consulting and factors involved in becoming a successful international organizational consultant. The first section, written by an American, outlines the need for communication consulting, describes an organizational need hierarchy model that can help consultants diagnose organizational problems, and examines specific consultant intervention behaviors that follow from such a diagnosis. In the second section, a Belgian points to the need for United States businesses to make distinctions between domestic and international consulting; he then discusses opinions of Europeans regarding problems in working with Americans, considers specific qualities needed by international consultants, and provides a list of questions that may be used to test knowledge about a host culture. The final section relates personal experiences of an Australian in adjusting to cultural differences in the United States and discusses stages in a consultant's interaction with a group, noting the types of behavior that will result in group acceptance of the consultant. (GT)

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PREPARING CONSULTANTS FOR MULTINATIONAL CONSULTING

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A paper presented at the International Communication Association Annual Convention, Acapulco, Mexico, May, 1980

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This paper contains three separate sections. Each of us has attempted to discuss from our own perspective the difficulties of becoming a successful international organizational consultant. The first section focuses on issues of organizational consulting in general. The second and third sections relate to the problems of applying consulting to the international arena.

WHY COMMUNICATION CONSULTING?

Perhaps the first reaction to this paper might be "why communication consulting?" I believe that we have the ability to contribute to those who need our services. A survey of over 3,000 business managers indicated that they felt they, as well as their subordinates, needed more education and skill development in several vital communication areas.[1] Top managers responded in the following manner regarding the educational needs of their subordinates.

	Subordinate Needs Percentage
Effective Written Communication	74
Effective Speaking	67
Working Efficiently with Individuals and Groups	66
Communication in the Organization	65
Listening Skills	61

In a recent study of perceived preferences for management training, 217 corporations responded that communication skills rated a higher priority for training than planning, technical aspects of supervision, motivation skills, or technical aspects of the job. In fact, between 67 and 92 percent of those surveyed (depending on the corporate level of

the respondent) rated communication skills as either a 4 or 5 on a scale from 1 (low priority) to 5 (high priority).[2]

Another survey of 195 businesses in Michigan indicated that "effective communication" was the skill most cited when they were asked what skills they look for in their potential managers and supervisors. They indicated that these skills were considered even more important than college degrees.[3]

Even in as unlikely a career as engineering a factor analysis of job skills indicated communication skills to be more important than technical engineering expertise as requirements for successful job performance.[4] Furthermore, formal engineering education does not typically stress the development of interpersonal skills.[5]

A survey of 147 Florida State University honors graduates in business indicated that in their profession, their college communication courses ranked second only to accounting* as having considerable importance and benefit to their business careers.[6] These surveys clearly document the high degree of importance of communication effectiveness in organizations. One behavioral scientist summarizes the situation this way:

> Managers increasingly appear to be realizing that they need help in dealing with human problems in organizations. This need is being reflected not only in industrial concerns but certainly in government at all levels, in educational institutions, in religious groups, and even in social organizations.[7]

At the same time, the communication profession has begun to show increasing interest in developing both undergraduate and graduate

*Other required subject areas rated were (in descending order of importance) finance, economics, management, business law, quantitative methods, marketing, and risk of insurance.

courses in organizational communication. Downs and Larimer obtained survey data from 100 departments listed in the 1972 Director of Graduate Programs in Speech Communication. They concluded that organizational communication is a growing area within our discipline.[8]

Diagnosing Organizational Needs

It is obvious that the need for developing communication skills within organizations exists, and the supply of those able to meet such a need also seems to be increasing. The logical next step is to apply what we know to the problem area.

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of consulting is being able to provide the appropriate service to meet the client's needs. The first step in providing this service is accurately and adequately diagnosing their needs. My colleagues and I have developed a diagnostic model which helps consultants conceptualize the client's needs.[9] This model is analogous to the individual needs hierarchy proposed by Maslow.[10]

Survival. In several organizations with which we are familiar, the consultant's role was to help the organization keep from terminating its operations. In one case, a new union contract had to be renegotiated with substantial wage reductions in order to preserve the organization and ultimately the employees' jobs. Communication consultants were brought in to help negotiate the settlement.

Security. In a less severe case, 600 people's jobs were threatened due to cost overruns, but the organization's survival was not threatened. We were brought in to help management solve this problem. Our role was to advise and counsel top management. We devised a plan to meet with

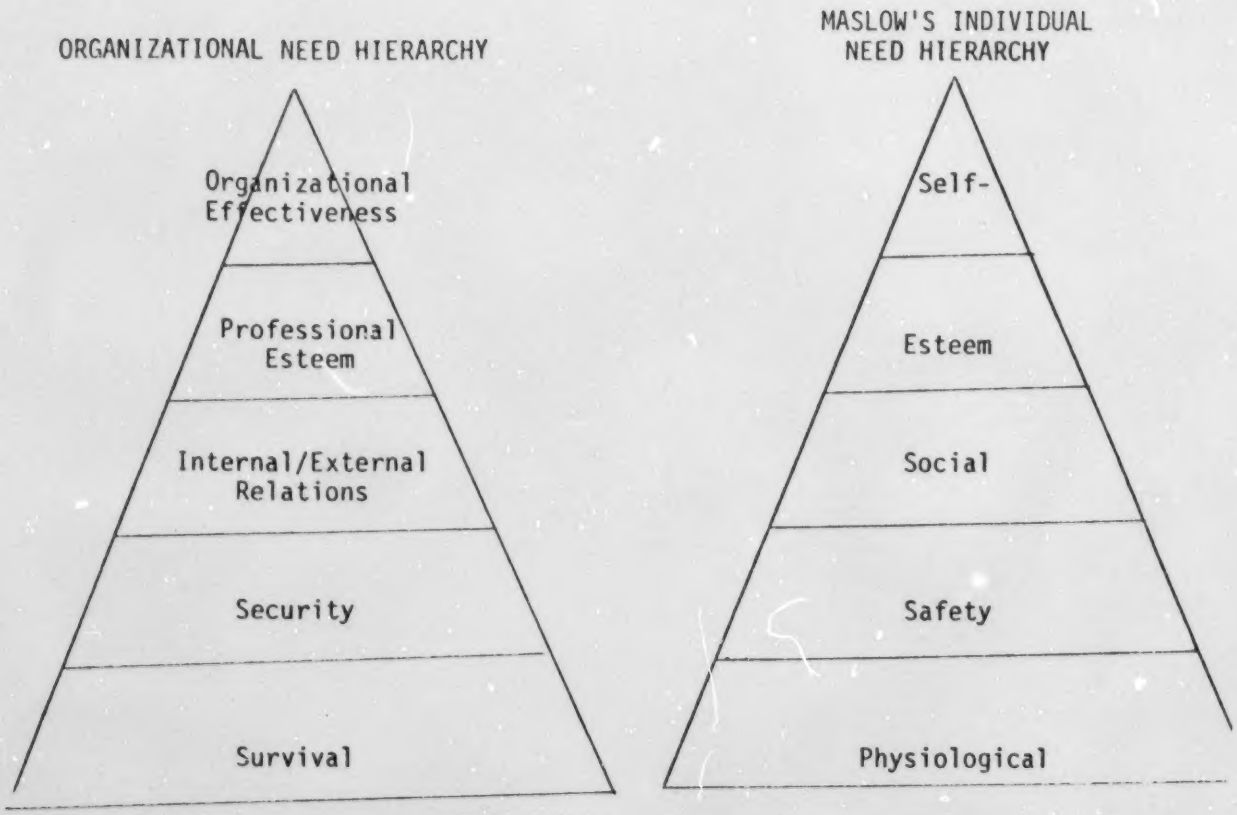

ORGANIZATIONAL NEED HIERARCHY
Organizational Effectiveness
Professional Esteem
Internal/External Relations
Security
Survival
MASLOW'S INDIVIDUAL NEED HIERARCHY
Self-
Esteem
Social
Safety
Physiological

Figure 1

all 600 employees in small work groups to explain the details of the problem and enlist their help in saving their own jobs. Management was reluctant at first to share such intimate financial information with the employees, but eventually it resulted in substantial increases in cost efficiency and over a 12-month period, the 600 jobs were saved.

Internal/External Relations. Due to the mixture of cultures in any multinational organization, the probabilities for misunderstandings and resulting dissatisfaction are significantly increased. It is difficult for a North American who prides himself or herself on time management to imagine trying to conduct business with Arabs or Latin Americans or orientals or even British, French or Italians whose concept of time is so much more "laid back" than ours. And yet, for the consultant who becomes comfortably familiar with these cultural differences, the need for helping improve organizational relations lies directly in the arena of communication consulting.

This type of consulting may be to improve the working relationships between departments, or between foreign units and the organization's home office, or any number of other internal relations difficulties. If the client organization's problems lie more in the external relationships, the so-called public relations function may become the focus of the consultant's attention.

Professional Esteem. Closely related to the relations needs of the organization are the professional esteem needs. Whereas at a university the external relations level may deal with town and gown relations, the professional esteem level deals with improving the status and respect of a unit in the eyes of other professionals. Speech and communication departments historically have not held the same level of esteem as departments of physics, mathematics, or engineering. At this need level, the consultant must focus on helping the client put its "best foot forward" to others in its professional community. Media

presentations, newsletters, and special institutes and conferences may be used in this manner.

Organizational Effectiveness. The first four levels of the hierarchy are deficiency needs, those in which some level of attainment is felt to be lacking. However, at the top level of the hierarchy we encounter what Maslow called the growth needs. "The desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming."

We spent almost two years working with one client organization which fit at this level of the hierarchy. The top manager said he had a very successful operation, but he wanted to see how good it could become. As a result of our efforts, significant improvements in employee attitude were documented along with 7½ million dollars cost savings due to reduced scrap and reduced absenteeism.

Once the organization's needs have been diagnosed, the consultant's intervention plan becomes appropriate. The next section of the paper deals with the consultant's behaviors. The possibilities for developing a diagnostic tool designed to help consultants measure the specific need level of an organization are most exciting. Such an instrument is critical in generating the data needed to validate the theoretical assumptions discussed in this paper. Also, the specification of the behavioral components associated with organizational needs serves as a basis for the development of training programs to improve consultant effectiveness.

Now that we have presented a theoretical model for helping consultants diagnose organizational problems, it seems appropriate to look at some of the specific consultant intervention behaviors which logically

follow from such a diagnosis. This discussion takes the model from the theoretical to the practical. If the organizational needs model is going to be of practical use to consultants, then consultants must have a clear understanding of what things he or she must actually do after the diagnosis. By suggesting specific behaviors based upon an analysis of the organization's specific needs, consultants will know what skills and specific interventions are most likely to be appropriate to the client's needs.

Most organizational development experts agree that the consultant should try to avoid developing prescriptive "doctor-patient" relationships. Such relationships develop an unhealthy dependency and lack of ownership in organizational problems. Rather, the goal of the consultant should be to help the organization learn to develop the resources necessary to deal effectively with their problems (Schein).[11] We agree that organizations can become too dependent on consultants once that consultant's effectiveness is increased when the consultant gets the organization to take ownership for their problems. However, it is our belief that before such ownership can be developed, consultants must deal with "where clients are at." Often where an organization is at is not where the consultant would like the organization to be. This means that a consultant's behavior will vary depending on the needs of the client organization. In one situation, a consultant may need to be very direct and even prescriptive. However, in another situation a consultant's role may be very indirect, involving behaviors which help the client organization develop its own strategies for change.

Schmidt and Johnston[12] have developed a continuum of client vs. consultant-centered interaction behaviors. According to these authors,

the consultant has a variety of options as to role. The list below shows the wide range of potential consultant/client system behaviors.

1. Refuses to become involved: The consultant who feels uncomfortable with the client may refuse to become involved. Similarly, he may refuse to do so if he feels that the client does not really want to help or if he already has too many other commitments.

2. Listens and reflects: At this level, the consultant tries to clarify his understanding of the client's problem. He may use such phrases as: "If I understand correctly, you are saying. . ." or "Are you saying that. . ."

3. Clarifies and interprets: The consultant may rephrase the client's comments to sharpen them or may interpret what the client intends to say by putting together the ideas underlying a number of comments.

4. Probes and gathers data: Now, the consultant begins to take a more active role. He may ask questions about material that the client has not yet brought up, or he may gather new data, e.g., through interviews, observations or questionnaires.

5. Feeds back data: At this level, the consultant provides the client system with new data. Such data may have been gathered from the client system itself, and frequently they are "dissonant" with the client system's own data. For example, survey feedback may show that the perceptions of the managers about the work culture and attitudes of the employees are very different from what the managers had expected.

6. Identifies available options: Many of the preceding steps have served to identify or isolate problems or to bring known problems into sharper focus. From his diagnosis of the problems and his interaction with the client system, the consultant may now suggest alternative forms of action--either mildly or forcefully, depending on his rapport with the client.

7. Proposes criteria: Occasionally, the client knows what the problem is and the action alternatives available, but is not certain which alternative is the best. In this case, the consultant can help the client to develop evaluative criteria and then to use those criteria in selecting a particular alternative.

8. Recommends and/or prescribes: At this level of the Schmidt and Johnson continuum, the consultant may recommend a particular action, based on his expert knowledge and his understanding of the situation. He can describe the options open to the client and give his reasons for making the particular

recommendation, bearing in mind that the client must make the final decision, for it is the client who must live with the consequences of that decision. In extreme cases, the consultant may prescribe a particular action, based on his knowledge and expertise.

9. Plans implementation: In the most "consultant-centered" approach, the consultant not only prescribes the solution but also plans the action steps that are necessary to carry out the prescription.

A look at this list suggests that the consultant has a wide variety of role options available for interventions. These behaviors range from very direct, prescriptive behaviors (planning implementation, recommending and/or prescribing) to very indirect behaviors (clarifying, interpreting, listening or refusing to become involved at all).

The above conceptual framework has specific application to our notion of an organizational need hierarchy. For example, if the consultant diagnoses an organization to be at the "survival" need level, a consultant would likely be called in to "bail out" the organization. The choice of a consultant would be based on the consultant's knowledge and expertise in a certain area. For example, a company whose survival depends upon the development of a more competitive product might hire a consultant to make specific recommendations on product changes and marketing strategies. The role of the consultant in such a situation is a very direct and prescriptive one. The organization's survival depends upon the knowledge, experience and specific recommendations of the consultant. In such a situation it would be inappropriate for the consultant to employ a strategy designed to help the organization "help themselves." Such a role would not be appropriate to the need level of the organization. The organization is telling the consultant that they cannot solve their own problems. The only way to survive is through

information and action based on the consultant's expertise and knowledge. The consultant's role in this situation should be direct, prescriptive and certain specific recommendations for implementation.

On the other hand, an organization at the internal, external relations level may ask a consultant to help with what the organization describes as "communication" problems between employees and among departments. In meeting the needs of the organization at this level, the consultant would be best to use a combination of both direct and indirect skills. The consultant would likely begin by gathering information in order to accurately identify the attempt to better understand the organization's problems. Once this has been done, the consultant would conduct meetings in order to "feed back" the information collected. At these meetings the consultant would attempt to explain and clarify the data in hopes that the group would begin to make their own judgments, interpretations and recommendations regarding the problem. In this example the consultant would initially use a very direct prescribed intervention (survey feedback). However, in feeding back the information, the consultant would play a more neutral role using more indirect behaviors in order to get the group to begin to own the problem.

An organization diagnosed to be at the far end of the organizational need hierarchy (organizational effectiveness) does not need a consultant to prescribe a specific solution. Such an organization is generally characterized by strong top management support, high morale, involvement in decision making by employees and a demonstrated ability to take ownership for their problems. An organization of this nature is only interested in "fine tuning" an already effective organization. In this situation the consultant would do well to rely on the client organization's

knowledge and experience and use behaviors (probing, clarifying, interpreting) designed to get the client organization to help themselves. In this situation the organization does not need someone outside the organization telling them what they need to do. Instead the consultant acts as a process consultant using interventions designed to get the client organization to plan their own strategies and take responsibility and ownership for decisions made.

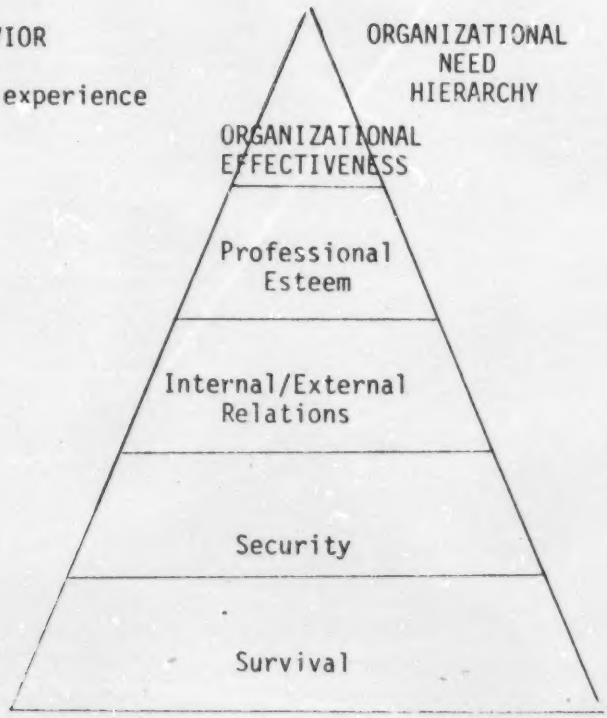
This discussion has suggested that there are certain consultant behaviors appropriate depending on the organizational need diagnosed. These behaviors can be better seen on a continuum ranging from direct to indirect. Figure 2 shows the organizational need hierarchy with the behavior continuum to the left.

The above conceptualization suggests that at lower levels of the organizational need hierarchy, organizations need the expertise, knowledge and experience of a consultant. Such a need requires very direct, prescribed behaviors from a consultant. However, as the needs of an organization progress to higher levels, consultants must capitalize on the knowledge and experiences of the organization in developing their strategies. The use of a more indirect approach seems more appropriate in adapting to higher level needs.

The use of the organizational need hierarchy model will serve as a useful framework for consultants interested in more clearly defining the expectations of their relationships. The possibilities for developing a diagnostic tool designed to help consultants measure the specific need level of an organization are most exciting. Such an instrument is critical in generating the data needed to validate the theoretical assumptions discussed in this paper. Also, the specification of the

CONSULTANT BEHAVIOR

Indirect (relies on knowledge and experience of organization)



Direct (relies on knowledge and experience of consultant)

Figure 2

behavioral components associated with organizational needs serves as a basis for the development of training programs to improve consultant effectiveness.

This section of the paper has focused on problems that any organizational consultant must face in any country. In the next two sections Eric and Miriam will discuss the additional problems associated with consulting across international contexts .

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CONSULTING FOR MULTI-NATIONAL COMPANIES

by

Eric R. Van Acker

Is there really a need to make a distinction between domestic and international consulting? The answer is without any doubt: yes. Consider the following:

1. In recent years, a growing number of authors have dedicated a part of their work to topics such as "cultural awareness training,"[1] "cross-cultural orientation,"[2] and "nonverbal communication differences."[3]
2. A gigantic company such as General Motors Corporation, has become aware of the need for "cultural awareness training" for its I.S.P. (International Service Personnel) group. They developed a training program which is not only geared towards a basic knowledge of the foreign language but also towards an understanding of the socio-cultural situation in that particular country.
3. The U. S. Foreign Policy has never been so heavily criticized. A lack of in-depth knowledge of "what is going on" in some countries is the major criticism, heard not only outside the U. S., but even within the U. S. (e.g., U. S. relations with Uganda, Iran, Afghanistan. . .).
4. Times are changing. The U. S. is no longer the unchallenged number one in the world.[4] Although the awareness of this fact is growing very slow, more and more Americans start to question themselves and. . .the foreigners they meet. Among the questions I had to answer about Americans:

"Don't you feel that Americans believe like they know everything better?"

"Do you think Americans are ridiculous?"

"Do you like Americans?"

"How are Americans viewed in your country?"

In recent years Americans have become not only interested in the attitude and behavior of non-Americans but also in the reasons for that particular attitude or behavior. It is logical that the international consultant has to follow this trend.

WHAT BOTHERS FOREIGN COUNTERPARTS ABOUT WORKING WITH AMERICANS?

This interesting question was asked by Jack Grey.[5] This question elicited six major responses.

1. <u>They display feelings of superiority; they know the answers to everything</u>.

It is amazing to see that although the U.S. "saved" Europe two times in two World Wars, they are not always liked over there. Several Americans asked me how this was possible: "It's really not fair. We are always ready to help wherever in the world there is a disaster and yet. . ."

The answer is very simple. It is not enough to give, it is <u>how</u> you give that is important. Giving, and leaving the impression that you can easily afford it, is not making a favorable impression on the receivers of your help. Feelings of inferiority and superiority occur. And nobody likes to feel inferior.

Not only Americans are often blamed for this kind of behavior. Germans still have a hard time in gaining acceptance in some European countries. This is not caused by the souvenirs of two world wars. It is the attitude and behavior of some Germans while visiting a particular country, that evokes the memory of two world wars.

So it is not surprising that the American consultant will be seen first as an American, and only later as a consultant. It is up to him to prove that the "American image" is not applicable to every American. There is nothing wrong about being superior, the essence is to make the others willingly accept and recognize your superiority.

2. They want to take credit for what is accomplished in joint efforts.

Having read the first response, it is not surprising to see this one. If one thinks he is superior, it will be difficult for him to recognize the input of the others, whom he perceives as being inferior.

As a matter of fact, I don't believe this trend is uniquely American. I believe that in general a large number of fast-track achievers (or WATERWALKERS) tend to make their names by taking credit for what is accomplished in joint efforts. In my country it is even accepted as a normal, though unfortunate, process. Isn't it so that the boss always gets the credit for what his people achieved?

Since Americans are extremely geared to competition, performance and fast-track careers, it is not surprising to see some of them using this universal tactic. But already having the "American image" it is not forgiven, where it might be for the local man.

3. They are frequently unable or willing to respect and adjust to local customs and cultures.

The American life style is unique in the world. Not everybody is aware of this. The example of the shouting American tourist who is filled with indigestion because he doesn't have ice cubes in his coke, is well known. He forgets that ice cubes are not a must in every country.

The American way of cutting meat is considered by the Europeans as primitive and is the subject of a lot of jokes. Eating with only a fork is

considered as being impolite. The way most Americans treat wine and flowers make the French talk about "massacre and barbarianism"

The American manager transferred overseas who demands a bigger company car is another example. He forgets that a middle size American car is considered as a big car overseas.

Often Americans dress "funny." I once knew a new American manager who just took over a very important position. His prestige was unfortunately jeopardized by the way he was dressed, when he appeared for the first time at his office. The color combination (yellow shirt, violet tie, brown jacket, blue-white plaid trousers(looked like the European version of "Bozzo the Clown." As soon as he turned the corner, everybody burst out laughing. A girl asked me, "Now seriously Eric, somebody that dresses like that cannot be that intelligent, don't you think?" Although I don't necessarily agree with this conclusion, and this kind of incident is rather amusing to the Europeans, the credibility of this young brilliant manager was questioned.

4. <u>They fail to innovate in terms of the needs of the local culture</u>.

The U. S. is, in comparison with most countries, more advanced in technology. The danger exists that the American manager (or consultant) will look for innovations based on the American situation, whereas the overseas employee is more looking for a less sophisticated solution.

Americans sometimes have problems with sizes. They think "big," because they are used to in the U. S. This is not always true overseas. It often happens that as soon as an American manager is settled in his overseas job he will request additional manpower, and this is not necessarily caused by additional work.

A lot of innovations are inspired by American situations and are there-

fore welcomed with reservation if not with hostility. In Belgium seniority plays an important role in one's career development. Young potential managers have to wait longer than they would have to in the U. S. In my position and with my age (29) I am considered at GM Belgium as having achieved something. In the U. S. I would be considered as almost over the hill. An American manager who would ignore that and promote the young potential anyway, would run into a lot of problems and so would the young "hot shot."

5. <u>They refuse to work through the normal administrative channels of the country</u>.

Local management sometimes has a tough job in making the U. S. manager understand that he has to respect the legal and contractual stipulations as well as the local existing administrative procedures.

It happened frequently that the local personnel manager ran into trouble with the Unions because of not reviewed overtime. The American department head had allowed overtime to be worked without notifying the personnel manager. The task of the personnel manager was to review the scheduled overtime with the Union's representatives, as it is required by Belgium Law.

It's also not unusual that an American manager schedules a yearly merit increase for his secretary that exceed the maximum allowed increase.

It is not possible for the American manager (or consultant) to know everything. Co-determination (West Germany), Works Council (Belgium), the existence of more than one Union and the <u>freedom</u> to be unionized or not are issues that affect local management. On the other hand, there are no E.E.O. requirements (except for the laws of equal treatment and opportunities for women) comparable to those of the U.S.A.

It is also not sufficient to know the organization chart but if is even

more important to be aware of the informal power-influence structures.

Therefore we think that the "foreign" manager or consultant should have confidence in the knowledge of local management, on local legal and administrative stipulations. This is the key to this issue.

6. They tend to lose their democratic ways of working and acting when in a foreign assignment.

One of the things that struck me the most, was the informal, open, friendly behavior of management in the U. S. Another surprise was the very strict Union-Management relations directed by extremely detailed national and local agreements. The E.E.O. impact on Personnel Management and organization astonished me.

Both Union-Management relation and E.E.O. regulations made me realize that the American manager has a quite limited freedom of acting. And yet, overseas they behave sometimes like they come from a country where the manager is God himself.

I once heard the story of an American manager leaving an important meeting at a moment that a decision was still in process. When questioned by his superior about his early leaving, he mentioned he had to play golf! And yet, now that I am in the U. S. I can see that American managers are not afraid to work casual overtime on a basis of several hours a day.

The most surprising tendency is that some foreign (American) managers want to instill fear in their local subordinates. They think it is a successful management style. Even if it would be in terms of results (getting the sales or production targets), the image they leave after their departure is a serious handicap for their (foreign) colleagues taking over.

WHAT ARE SPECIFIC QUALITIES AN INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANT SHOULD HAVE?

Based on the development of the previous section, three major qualities seem clear:

1. knowledge of technical and human environment
2. high tolerance level
3. tact

1. Knowledge of the technical and human environment.

It is important for the consultant to know the basic elements of the technical environment prior to his arrival (topics are the country, the company who asked him). In addition he could get information about the human environment through a "cultural training" similar to the kind of training some companies give to their employees in preparation for a foreign assignment.

The necessity for an adequate cultural training is even greater for the consultant than for the manager who gets an X-year assignment abroad. The consultant will have to make a faster diagnosis of the local situation, than the manager who has time to learn. It is important to get this knowledge prior to the arrival in the foreign country, since there is a danger for being overloaded by information and new experiences upon arrival.

The first weeks (2-4) I was in the U.S., I ended the day as a sleep walker because I was exhausted by all those new experiences, and yet I don't come from an underdeveloped country and I have travelled a lot in the past!

2. High tolerance level.

But the knowledge is not enough, there is more. One can be fully aware of a cultural difference and yet neglect it. Having travelled through 25 different countries in Europe, North America and Africa, I think having obtained a tolerance level that helps me accept cultural differences.

I noticed for example that nationalism is not perceived as being ridiculous in the U.S., whereas in Belgium it almost doesn't exist anymore due to an increased linguistic rivalry between the Dutch speaking North and

the French speaking South. In Africa many secessions and internal revolutions originated from a lack of national feeling. Tribalism is more important over there.

A high tolerance level made me accept the situations I was faced with during my travel experiences and made me also adapt in the U. S., faster than some of my friends. With a low tolerance level I probably would not be successful in my dealings with Americans and not get the information I am seeking.

Showing a high tolerance level can enhance the credibility of the foreign consultant. It makes the others accept him like he is and can generate a spontaneous acceptance of his superiority in a particular skill.

3. Tact.

Very close to a high tolerance level is tact. Whereas tolerance would mainly refer to an attitude, tact refers to behavior. Tact enhances the process of acceptance. Every foreigner is viewed with a certain suspicion especially in the situation of a foreign assignment. Being aware of this and. . .tolerating it, combined with a tactful behavior will help replace this suspicion by trust. Two examples will clarify:

1. Four years ago, GM decided to locate its third European Computer Center in Antwerp, Belgium. A brilliant young Danish manager arrived in Antwerp with the assignment to turn GM Antwerp's computer center into a European center with terminals from Skandinavia to Italy. Being a foreigner, being the youngest department head and much younger than his immediate Belgium assistants, not being familiar with Belgium laws and Union agreements and besides the technical difficulties he would face, this young man

got a terrible responsibility. Some local managers thought he would quickly fail. The decisions he had to make were hard and he very soon got the reputation of "the ice cold inhuman skandinavian." Working patiently and with persistence bit by bit he got the full support within his own department (management-programmers-operators-data operators-communication section) and within GM Antwerp. After being hated some years ago, he is liked and respected by everyone today. One of the girls that couldn't stand him in the beginning told me recently with pride that he is speaking Dutch. For this girl, making an effort to learn the local language, even when there was not a real need for it, was something that she never expected from a foreigner; especially from such a tough man as he.

2. Before my departure to the U.S. I was told never to say to Americans that "we" in Belgium, had something better than they had, since a majority of the Americans think they have everything bigger and better. Recognizing the superiority of American technology and showing a great interest in all they were doing, I very soon got excellent collaboration in two different GM divisions as well as in GM's Central Office. It was only in a later stage that I allowed myself to mention some achievements of GM Belgium, and that I had the pleasure of being asked to make presentations about what we were doing over there.

Today, we are guests of the Mexican government. What do we really know about this country? Do you want to find out? Turn to the next page where you will find a questionnaire to test your knowledge. Good luck, you will need it!

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE HOST CULTURE?[1]

1. How many people who are prominent in the affairs (politics, athletics, religion, the arts, etc.) of your host country can you name?

2. Who are the country's national heroes and heroines?

3. Can you recognize the national anthem?

4. Are other languages spoken besides the dominant language? What are the social and political implications of language usage?

5. What is the predominant religion? Is it a state religion? Have you read any of its sacred writings?

6. What are the most important religious observances and ceremonies? How regularly do people participate in them?

7. How do members of the predominant religion feel about other religions?

8. What are the most common forms of marriage ceremonies and celebrations?

9. What is the attitude toward divorce? extra-marital relations? plural marriage?

10. What is the attitude toward gambling?

11. What is the attitude toward drinking?

12. Is the price asked for merchandise fixed or are customers expected to bargain? How is the bargaining conducted?

13. If, as a customer, you touch or handle merchandise for sale, will the storekeeper think you are knowledgeable, inconsiderate, within your rights, completely outside your rights? Other?

14. How do people organize their daily activities? What is the normal meal schedule? Is there a daytime rest period? What is the customary time for visiting friends?

15. What foods are most popular and how are they prepared?

16. What things are taboo in this society?

17. What is the usual dress for women? for men? Are slacks or shorts worn? If so, on what occasions? Do teenagers wear jeans?

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[1] Adapted from a list developed by Joan Wilson, Foreign Service Institute U.S. Department of State.

18. Do hairdressers use techniques similar to those used by hairdressers in the United States? How much time do you need to allow for an appointment at the hairdressers?

19. What are the special privileges of age and/or sex?

20. If you are invited to dinner, should you arrive early? on time? late? If late, how late?

21. On what occasions would you present (or accept) gifts from people in the country? What kind of gifts would you exchange?

22. Do some flowers have a particular significance?

23. How do people greet one another? shake hands? embrace or kiss? How do they leave one another? What does any variation from the usual greeting or leave-taking signify?

24. If you are invited to a cocktail party, would you expect to find among the guests foreign business people? men only? men and women? local business people? local politicians? national politicians? politicians' spouses? teachers or professors? bankers? doctors? lawyers? intellectuals such as writers, composers, poets, philosophers, religious clerics? members of the host's family? (including in-laws?) movie stars? ambassadors or consular officials from other countries?

25. What are the important holidays? How is each observed?

26. What are the favorite leisure and recreational activities of adults? teenagers?

27. What sports are popular?

28. What kinds of television programs are shown? What social purposes do they serve?

29. What is the normal work schedule? How does it accommodate environmental or other conditions?

30. How will your financial position and living conditions compare with those of the majority of people living in this country.

31. What games do children play? Where do children congregate?

32. How are children disciplined at home?

33. Are children usually present at social occasions? at ceremonial occasions? If they are not present, how are they cared for in the absence of their parents?

34. How does this society observe children "coming of age?"

35. What kind of local public transportation is available? Do all classes of people use it?

FOOTNOTES

1. Philip R. Harris, Training and Development Journal, March 1979, p. 64-74.

2. Wayne O. Shabaz, The Personnel Administrator, May 1978, p. 54-57.

3. Melvin Schapper, The 1975 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators.

4. Prof. Dr. Hugo Uyterhoeven, Harvard, in his speech during GMI's Industrial Administration Symposium "Worldwide Management", September 18, 1979.

5. Jack Grey, The Most Common Criticisms of American Technical Assistants by their Foreign Co-Workers (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M, 1975) p. 25.

CONSULTING FOR MULTI-NATIONAL COMPANIES

by

MIRIAM BASS

After winning an overseas fellowship which would involve working and studying in the United States for one year, I, together with the other Australian participants received an orientation talk by the Training Manager of our company. In this talk, the fellowship holders were warned of the effects of "culture shock." I was rather amused by this, as I had previously travelled through parts of South East Asia and the South Pacific on vacation and had not experienced any effects of culture shock. In fact, I considered that, justly, it is the differences in culture which make travelling so rewarding, and, secondly, that there surely could not be a great difference between my home country of Australia and the United States. Both have a similar western, democratic way of life and culture. However, soon after my arrival in America, I discovered that there was a considerable difference between visiting a foreign country as a tourist and trying to adapt to a foreign country as a place of work and residence. I felt generally disoriented and did experience some effects of culture shock. Being part of the increasing international exchange of personnel of multi-national corporations. I would like to discuss a few of my experiences and insights pertaining to the cultural issues a consultant may face while consulting for a multi-national company.

The Oxford dictionary defines culture as being all the arts, beliefs, social institutions, characteristic of a community, race, etc. I experienced some disorientation soon after my arrival in the United States because there were more differences in American culture than I had

expected. These ranged from differences in accent and coping with driving on the opposite side of the road to that which I was accustomed, to other, perhaps more trivial things, e.g., light switches operating in the opposite direction and being unable to operate taps for showers, etc. I found that I could only cope with a certain amount of unfamiliarity before I experienced fatigue and became frustrated at the small differences which made me feel so helpless. I also found these differences to be time-consuming. The experience of my first visit to the supermarket will illustrate this. It took me about twice as long to complete my shopping and was very frustrating because I did not recognize any of the labels or brand names on the merchandise and could not find some items which I wanted.

I adopted a strategy which helped me to cope with my new environment. I found that by consciously attempting only one new experience each day, even if it turned out to be negative, by analyzing it and learning from it, I could soon tolerate changes and minimize the effects of culture shock.

Although the language of my host country is the same as my native tongue, I found that there were subtle differences in the use of the language which sometimes lead to a misunderstanding. Perhaps this humorous example will illustrate this point. I was assigned to a person at work to observe the duties of a particular position. After spending a short amount of time with him I remarked that he had accomplished a great deal in a short period of time. He replied, "When you are with me you have to hang onto your fanny and run like crazy!" I was shocked by his reply because to an Australian the word "fanny" has different connotations than it has to an American. I had a vivid picture of myself running after this person with my hands placed strategically in a fig-leaf position. Therefore, a consultant who is working among people whose native tongue is the same must be

aware of the subtleties and colloqualisms in the language, as otherwise there may be a communications gap.

My previous position in Australia involved counselling people from varied national backgrounds. In my dealings with Vietnamese employees I found that they would never say if they did not understand any instructions they were given. This sometimes resulted in their doing jobs incorrectly and could result in industrial accidents. I discovered that this was because in the Vietnamese culture it is impolite to admit that one does not understand. This illustrates that one must understand the methods and culture and how this influences attitudes and behavior.

Adapting to my new environment at work I found that in some cases I had a different set of norms and values. This manifested itself in the way I perceived matters which, in some cases, was different to that of my colleagues. This could lead to conflict for a consultant in a multi-national company. During the period I was a student at the General Motors Institute in Flint, Michigan, I conducted some research among the international community of persons participating in the GM Overseas Fellowship Programme on the effects of cultural differences in the perception of work. I interviewed ten people from eight different countries:
England, Korea, Brazil, Germany, New Zealand, France, Portugal and Australia. I found the norm in France about attitudes towards work is that work is not seen as being of importance for social support, whereas it was perceived by the respondent as being necessary in America. Moreover, the French management style is more paternal and authoritarian than the American style, and is expected to be so.[1] This difference in values could result in an American Organization Development Consultant having difficulties trying to implement a more participative management style among

managers in France. This in turn could easily cause conflict in the organization and may not even work at all in this environment. Therefore, it would be necessary for the consultant to note and allow for the norms and values of his host environment rather than try to convert his new colleagues to values which are foreign to them.

"Differences in management style" was also the theme of an address to Chevrolet's Manufacturing Division by Professor Ouchi of Stanford University, where he cited tests done with 12 American companies operating with branches in Japan. The results showed that while Japanese business is successful in either culture, U.S. based companies are significantly less successful in Japan as they cannot adapt to Japanese methods. Those U.S. companies which he described as successful, e.g., IBM, are staffed and managed by locals in Japan. The Japanese are successful in the United States because they adapt more easily to new values and norms.[2]

The Cog's ladder model of group development may be used to show how a consultant interacts with the group and corresponding behavior which will result in the consultant becoming accepted by the group.

1. The Polite Stage

When a consultant is introduced, an important factor in the development of the group and its achievements is the state of the member's feelings towards the consultant.

The Polite Stage involves the introduction of the consultant to the group members, exchanging values and establishing the basis for the group structure. This is achieved by introductions and the group members attempting to discover if the consultant's values are the same as those of the group.[3] The group will feel more secure if they can anticipate the consultant's responses to accepted group activities and the consultant will be accepted if there is attitude similarity with the group.[4]

The preferred behavior for the consultant in this stage is to say acceptable things which do not threaten any group members and which highlight any similarities in beliefs and interests. The need for group approval is strong in this stage and the consultant may have to keep any differences in values below the surface in order to conform to the group's norms and thereby gain acceptance. Serious topics and disclosures on other than a superficial level are to be avoided.

Some group members may have hidden agendas, i.e., undisclosed needs and motives of an individual member of the group which may affect the way he reacts to the group's task. With a consultant in a multinational company interacting with a group for the first time, hidden agendas may involve feelings of hostility such as those due to traditional national animosities, e.g., a German consultant in a French division of the company; or feelings of inferiority as typified by parent/subsidiary relationships, or central office/branch rivalries. Group members may also categorize the consultant in a stereotype due to nationality, e.g., if the consultant is English he may be stereotyped as stuffy and conservative. Hidden agendas may not affect behavior at this time, but may influence the performance of the group at a later stage. The consultant should endeavor to be aware of these if possible.

2. Why We Are Here

The "Why We Are Here" stage follows the polite stage. The reason for the consultant's presence and the group's task is discussed. It is important, during this phase, for the consultant to achieve the respect of group members so that he may be influential in his role. It may be helpful to have an established member, who is already respected by his colleagues, give the consultant's background and explain the reason for his presence and the task. Group members will equate the status of their

colleague with the credibility of the message and better accept the consultant if it can be seen that this respected colleague already identifies with the consultant.

As a result, group members may reassess their hidden agendas. Cliques may subsequently form as members find a common purpose, supplementary to, or in conflict with the group's main objective, and which may fulfill their needs and incorporate a hidden agenda.

The group will be most dependent on the consultant in this stage after the task has been given. Members must discuss how goals will be met within certain criteria and will look to the consultant for decisions in achieving these ends.

3. Bid for Power

This will involve the consultant being "tried out." The consultant may be put in a position by a group member to assess the validity of the consultant's knowledge or expertise. The conflict may be characterized by a group member to assess the validity of the consultant's status or power. A typical action could involve the challenging of the consultant's knowledge or expertise. The conflict may be characterized as hostility due to a hidden agenda. This is the crucial stage for the consultant to maintain his status and power in order to remain effective in his role.

4. Constructive

A change in attitude will characterize the transition from the "Bid for Power" phase to the "Constructive" stage.[5] Group members will no longer attempt to control the consultant and may even change their preconceived ideas or opinions on the basis of the consultant's facts or behavior during the "Bid for Power." Team spirit will begin to develop as group identity becomes more important than the needs of individual members.

At this stage, the group's reliance on the consultant will decrease because the method of achieving the task has been defined and the roles of the group members, including the consultant, have been clarified. Therefore, the consultant's role should be low key in order for the group to become self-sufficient.

5. Esprit

At this stage the group is at its most constructive and productive. Some groups may never reach this stage. In this phase there is high morale and intense group loyalty is experienced. The group is closed and if a new member is introduced the feelings of esprit will be destroyed, even if only briefly, since the group will regress to an earlier stage and then proceed through all the stages again, incorporating the new member in the process.

There is no longer any need for the consultant's services in task achievement. However, it may be necessary for the consultant to intervene if a new member is introduced or to maintain the group's effectiveness over time.

Conclusion

The importance of cultural issues should not be overstated, but neither should it be ignored. In my experience, the importance of these differences in a new environment has tended to diminish with time. I have found living and working in a foreign country to be an exciting and rewarding experience. The Cog's ladder of group development is a tool that consultants can use to help them be aware of group dynamics when cultural differences may cloud the issues.

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